

# South Dakota National Guard

## Public Affairs Office

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## **196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade plays unique role in today's Army**

By Sgt. Mark VanGerpen – 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade

SIoux FALLS, S.D. – At least once a year, it's not unusual to see the Sioux Falls National Guard armory parking lot transformed into a sprawling complex of trucks, generators and combat tents.

The tents go up quickly, sometimes in the space of a few hours. The generators run around the clock. Inside is a state-of-the-art command post system, in which virtual troop movements are tracked on physical and digital maps.

In one tent, plans are made for transporting simulated detainees. In another, plans for repairing roads or meeting with local leaders. Battlefield intelligence is delivered up to the minute, ensuring Soldiers can respond immediately to any situation.

It is a complex operation, and nothing more than what the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, has come to expect.

From putting up the tents to controlling troop movements and a tactical combat force, every part of the operation is an integral part of the Sioux Falls-based unit's mission: protect and support everything behind the front line of combat, and be ready to move when it does.

The headquarters unit is only a small part of that mission. When deployed, a maneuver enhancement brigade consists of multiple units such as mechanized infantry, military police, engineers, and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN).

In fact, the actual makeup of a MEB will change depending on the mission. By design, the unit can be tailored to the needs of the battlefield. The forces that deploy with a MEB could be significantly different from one deployment to the next.

That customization distinguishes a MEB from other units in the Army. Traditionally, unit structures, like those of brigade combat teams, remain static across deployments.

"Brigade combat teams are made up of singular organic units," said Col. Patrick Pardy, commander of the 196th MEB. "That means they'll have armor, striker or infantry units, and their organization reflects that. MEBs are designed not only to have armor or striker forces, but also to command and control engineers, chemical and military police battalions – in addition to other combat multipliers such as artillery, civil affairs and explosive ordnance disposal."

A MEB is a relatively new concept by Army standards. The first was established in 2006, with the 196th following shortly after in 2007.

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The idea was to increase the Army's modularity – its ability to combine forces of multiple specialties into a single, functional unit that could be tailored to a battlefield in order to take command and control of a division or corps support area.

It sounds simple, but in practice it entails a wide variety of tasks.

It means protecting roads so troops and supplies can reach the front line; rebuilding infrastructure damaged in previous battles; defeating the enemy forces that remain in the area or try to move back into it; transporting detainees; disposing explosive ordnance; or conducting civil affairs.

And then, when the brigade boundary moves forward, it means the whole operation needs to be torn down, moved, put back up, and made functional again in very little time.

“MEB's are entrusted with a complicated and wide array of tasks,” Pardy said. “They are one of only four types of brigades that can actually own and control battle space. “

The multitude of requirements of a MEB leads to significant training and education requirements for its staff and Soldiers, Pardy said.

One of the challenges for the 196th is that it has positions for units it doesn't have. Maj. Jason Thomson, operations officer with the 196th, said that South Dakota's structure does not reflect the ideal structure of a MEB.

For example, one common denominator in MEBs is that they have units that specialize in CBRN threats.

But the 196th has no such unit, so a CBRN unit would have to join the MEB from another state during a deployment.

That isn't uncommon, Thomson said, but it creates a challenge when filling leadership positions in areas like CBRN at headquarters. The people who fill those positions often have to be retrained to become subject matter experts.

He added that although it is a challenge, it is also one of the 196th's strengths.

“Most NCOs and officers in the 196th have multiple branches or military occupation specialties,” Thomson said. “It creates diversity within our unit. When deployed, the MEB is typically going to pick up additional functional units, simply because the components of the MEB all deploy at different times. So it's a good thing to have people trained in more than one area.”

Additionally, the 196th tries to rotate its leadership from staff positions to line units so they can see how things work outside headquarters, Thomson said.

“People who work on staff for 20 years aren't going to relate to someone in the field as well as someone who has been out there with them, sleeping in the mud,” he said.

It's part of an effort to bring stability to the unit when it becomes deployable in 2021 and beyond. Recently MEBs transitioned out of the active Army, leaving the reserve components to establish MEB doctrine. Because of that, the 196th is working to bring to the table as much training and practical experience as possible so it can help make the MEB an effective, professional force.

“Every year we move a little closer to stabilization,” Thomson said. “We are aggressive in learning our functional areas, and we prepare for the worst so we're ready when it happens. That Midwest, hard-work ethic is what we're trying to instill within the MEB community.”

High-resolution photos are available at [www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard](http://www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard)



**150707-Z-DZ410-001:** Soldiers with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, South Dakota Army National Guard, begin construction of their mobile tactical operations center at annual training, July 13, 2015. HHC's headquarters complex can be torn down, moved, and quickly reconstructed as combat forces push the front line forward. The MEB is responsible for protection, command and control of the battle space behind the front lines. (U.S. Army National Guard archive photo by Staff Sgt. Charles Butler)



**140313-Z-6297J-002:** Soldiers from the fire support section of the South Dakota Army National Guard's 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade monitor battlefield operations via the Command Post of the Future system at the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence Digital Training Facility at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., March 13, 2014. The 196th trained on digital battlefield communication systems and put their skills to the test during a war fighter exercise administered by personnel from the DTF. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Charlie Jacobson)



**150713-Z-LDZ410-006:** Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, South Dakota Army National Guard, operates out of a mobile tactical operations center at annual training, July 13, 2015. HHC's headquarters complex can be torn down, moved, and quickly reconstructed as combat forces push the front line forward. The MEB is responsible for protection, command and control of the battle space behind the front lines. (U.S. Army National Guard archive photo by Staff Sgt. Charles Butler)



**150715-Z-DZ410-002:** A Soldier with the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, South Dakota Army National Guard, takes part in a route defense exercise, July 15, 2015. The 196th MEB is unique among most other U.S. Army units in that it is comprised of multiple different elements – such as engineers, military police, and civil affairs. The structure of the MEB is designed to be customizable for whatever is required by the mission and terrain. (U.S. Army National Guard archive photo by Staff Sgt. Charles Butler)



**150716-Z-DZ410-004:** Soldiers with the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, South Dakota Army National Guard, perform a river crossing exercise, July 16, 2015. The 196th MEB is unique among most other Army units in that it is comprised of multiple different elements – such as engineers, military police, and civil affairs. The structure of the MEB is designed to be customizable for whatever is required by the mission and terrain. (U.S. Army National Guard archive photo by Staff Sgt. Charles Butler)

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